


BROADBAND EXPANSION GRANT APPLICATION

For Fiscal Year 2022

Primary Applicant (Name and Address): Solarus 440 East Grand Avenue P.O. Box 8045 Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495-8045	Applications MUST be UPLOADED to ERF via the Commission's website, http://psc.wi.gov/apps35/ERF_upload/content/mymenu.aspx . Refer to section 2.3 for detailed instructions. Applications are due and MUST be uploaded to ERF no later than: March 17, 2022 at 4:00pm (16:00) Central Time. Late applications will not be accepted.
	Contact for further information: PSCStatebroadbandoffice@wisconsin.gov
	Date: December 1, 2021
<p>The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin is seeking applications for Broadband Expansion Grants. The Commission may award one or more grants during Fiscal Year 2022 to public and private entities that meet the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504. This grant round will be funded with bond proceeds authorized by the Wisconsin Building Commission pursuant to Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). As such, successful applicants are subject to the requirements of Wis. Stat. § 13.48(30). Successful applicants will demonstrate a clear and achievable plan to improve broadband communications services in one or more underserved areas in the state.</p>	
<p>Applicant Certification: In signing this application, the undersigned verifies under penalty of perjury that the Applicant and its employees and agents have not, either directly or indirectly, entered into any agreement or participated in any collusion or otherwise taken any action in restraint of free competition with respect to this application; that no attempt has been made to induce any other person or firm to submit or not to submit an application; that this application has been independently arrived at without collusion with any other proposer, competitor or potential competitor; that this application has not been knowingly disclosed prior to the opening of applications to any other applicant or competitor; that all of the responses and representations of Applicant in this application are true and correct to the best of the undersigned's knowledge, information, and belief; and that Applicant agrees to, accepts, and will comply with all of the terms and conditions respecting this application and any award of a broadband expansion grant as may be established in a grant award Agreement.</p>	
Name of Authorized Representative (Type or Print) Justin Huebner	Title General Manager and CEO
Signature of Authorized Representative 	Phone () (715) 424-8140
	Date 3/16/2022

SUMMARY OF GRANT APPLICATION

Primary Applicant Name Solarus	Amount of Broadband Grant Request (round to nearest dollar) \$818,836 (30%)
Federal Employer Identification No. 39-0720490	Amount of Matching Funds Pledged (round to nearest dollar) \$1,910,612 (70%)
Contact Name and Title Justin Huebner	Total Cost of Proposed Project (round to nearest dollar) \$2,729,448
Telephone Number (715) 421-8140	Project Name Village of Plover Phase 1
E-mail Address(es) jhuebner@solarus.net	Type of Proposed Broadband Service (FTTH, Cable, DSL, etc.) Fiber to the Home and Business
Grant Manager, if different than Primary Applicant	Type of Proposed Project (Last-mile, Middle-Mile, backbone, other) Last-mile
Grant Manager Contact Name	Grant Manager Email Address and Telephone Number
If the application proposes a public-private partnership, list the names, addresses, and FEINs of the partner companies or organizations Village of Plover, Dan Ault, Village Administrator, 2400 Post Road, P.O. Box 37, Plover, WI 54467, FEIN 39-1154795	
Brief Project Description (2 sentences) Provision of Fiber to the Home (FTTH) broadband to an unserved and underserved area containing 211 business and 1,264 residential locations in the Village of Plover.	
Maximum Proposed Download Transmission Speed FTTH: 1 Gbps and faster	Maximum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed FTTH: 1 Gbps and faster
Minimum Proposed Download Speed to Customer Location FTTH: 150 Mbps	Minimum Proposed Upload Transmission Speed to Customer Location FTTH: 150 Mbps
County or Counties served by this project Portage County	Community or Communities served by this project Village of Plover and Town of Plover
List of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve Charter and AT&T	

Does proposed project serve an unserved area of the state, as defined in Section 1.4 of the application instruction? (yes/no) Yes	Is the Applicant certified as a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community, or does the grant project propose to serve a Broadband Forward! Community or Telecommuter Forward! Community? (yes/no) No for both
For last mile projects or component the expected number of Business Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total business locations passed or with new service access). 211 Business Locations	For last mile projects or components the expected number of Residential Locations that will have access to the improved broadband service (i.e., total residential locations passed or with new service access). 1,264 Residential Locations
Of the improved business locations, how many locations are <i>unserved</i> ? 4 Unserved Business Locations	Of the improved residential locations, how many are <i>unserved</i> ? 2 Unserved Residential Locations
For providers that are eligible telecommunications carriers will the proposed broadband service be available to Lifeline customers? (yes/no) Yes	Are there any programs available for low-income households to access low-cost service or discounts? (yes/no) Yes
Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program? (yes/no) No, but will be ACP	Is the internet service provider currently participating in the Department of Public Instruction and CESA purchasing's Digital Learning Bridge? (yes/no) No, but worked with school districts directly
Did the internet service provider participate in the Public Service Commission's voluntary Broadband Coverage Data Collection in 2021? (yes/no) Yes	

FY22 Broadband Expansion Grant Application**Budget & Income Summary**

Please complete this form using Microsoft Excel. A PDF copy must be attached to your application as page four. In addition, this form must also be uploaded to ERF in Excel format.

Grant Summary

Grant Applicant:	Project:
Solarus	Village of Plover Phase 1

Budget

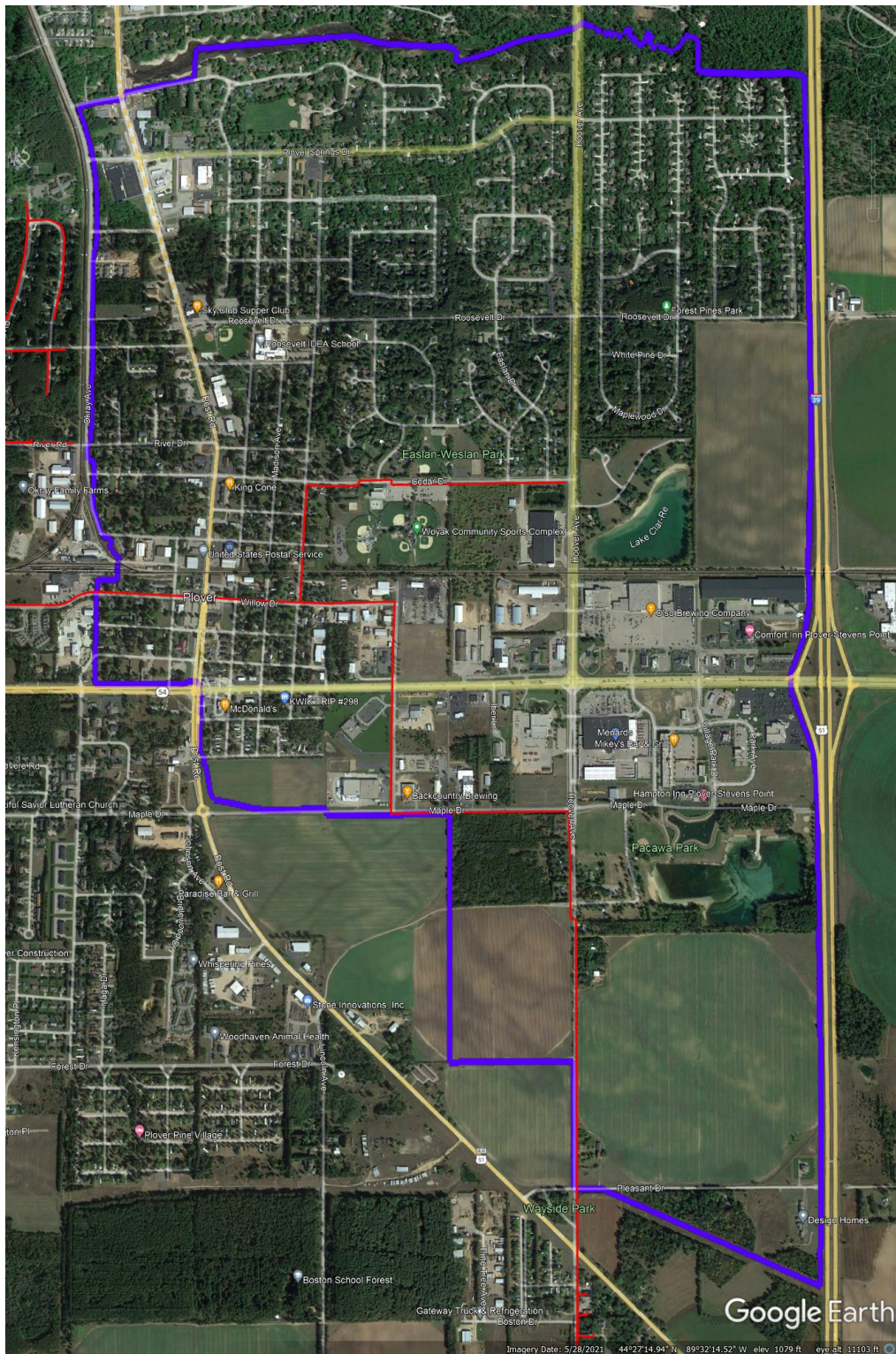
Line:	Description / Category:	Grant Funds:	Match:	Total:
1	Contractual, Consultant Fees	\$ 459,436.00	\$ 1,072,016.00	\$ 1,531,452.00
2	Equipment	\$ 325,546.00	\$ 759,605.00	\$ 1,085,151.00
3	Supplies			\$ -
4	Labor (Salary, Fringe)	\$ 33,854.00	\$ 78,991.00	\$ 112,845.00
5	Permitting, Licensing Fees			\$ -
6	Travel			\$ -
7	Other			\$ -
Total:		\$ 818,836.00	\$ 1,910,612.00	\$ 2,729,448.00
70.0% match requested				

Pledged Contributions

#:	Entity:	Entity Type:	Pledge Type:	Pledge:
1	Solarus	Applicant	Cash	\$ 1,831,621.00
2	Solarus	Applicant	Salary	\$ 78,991.00
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
Total:				\$ 1,910,612.00

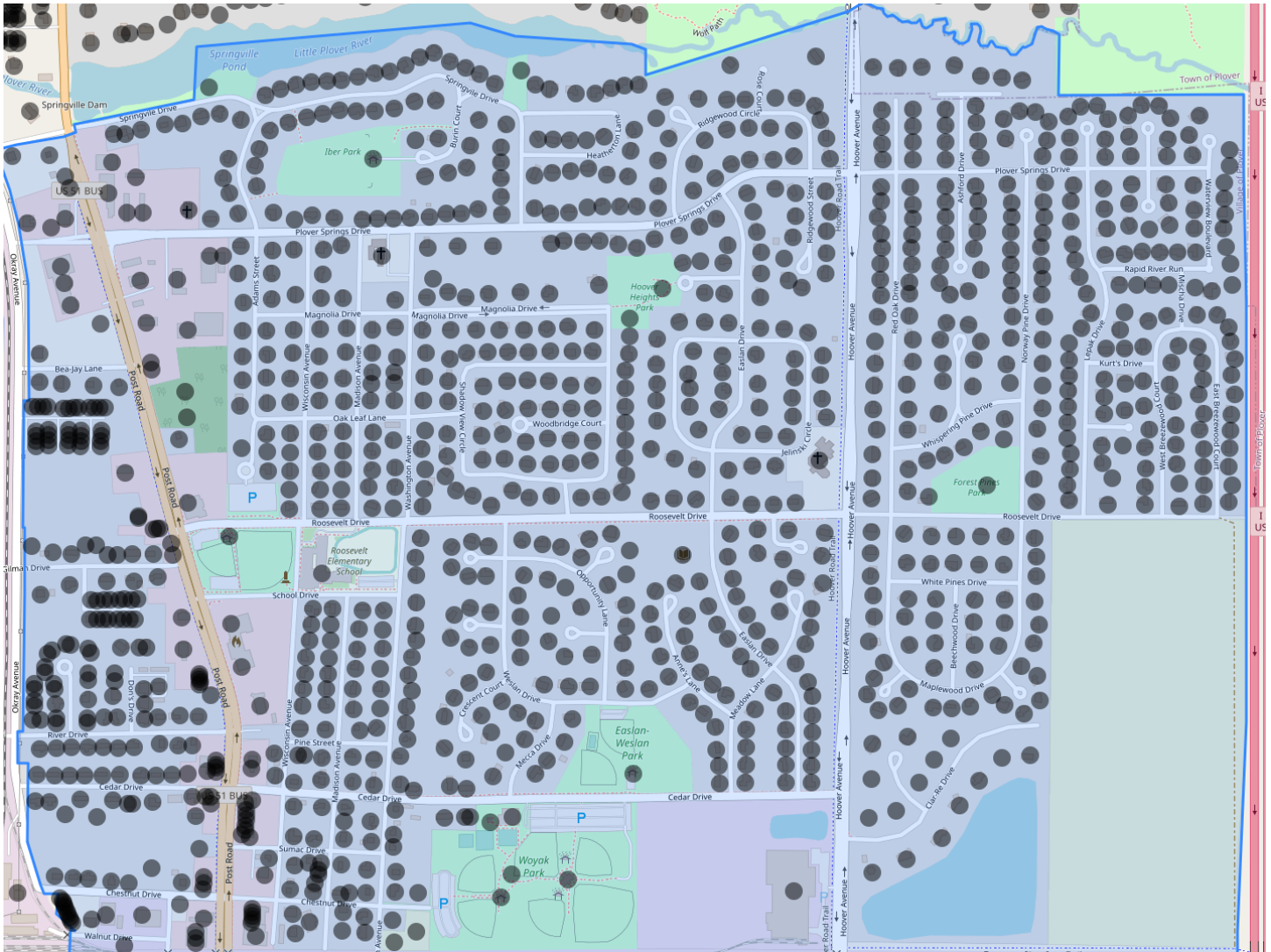
Overview Map of Village of Plover Phase 1 Service Area (Purple)

Existing Solarus Fiber (Red) – This is the ring and middle-mile fiber in the project area.



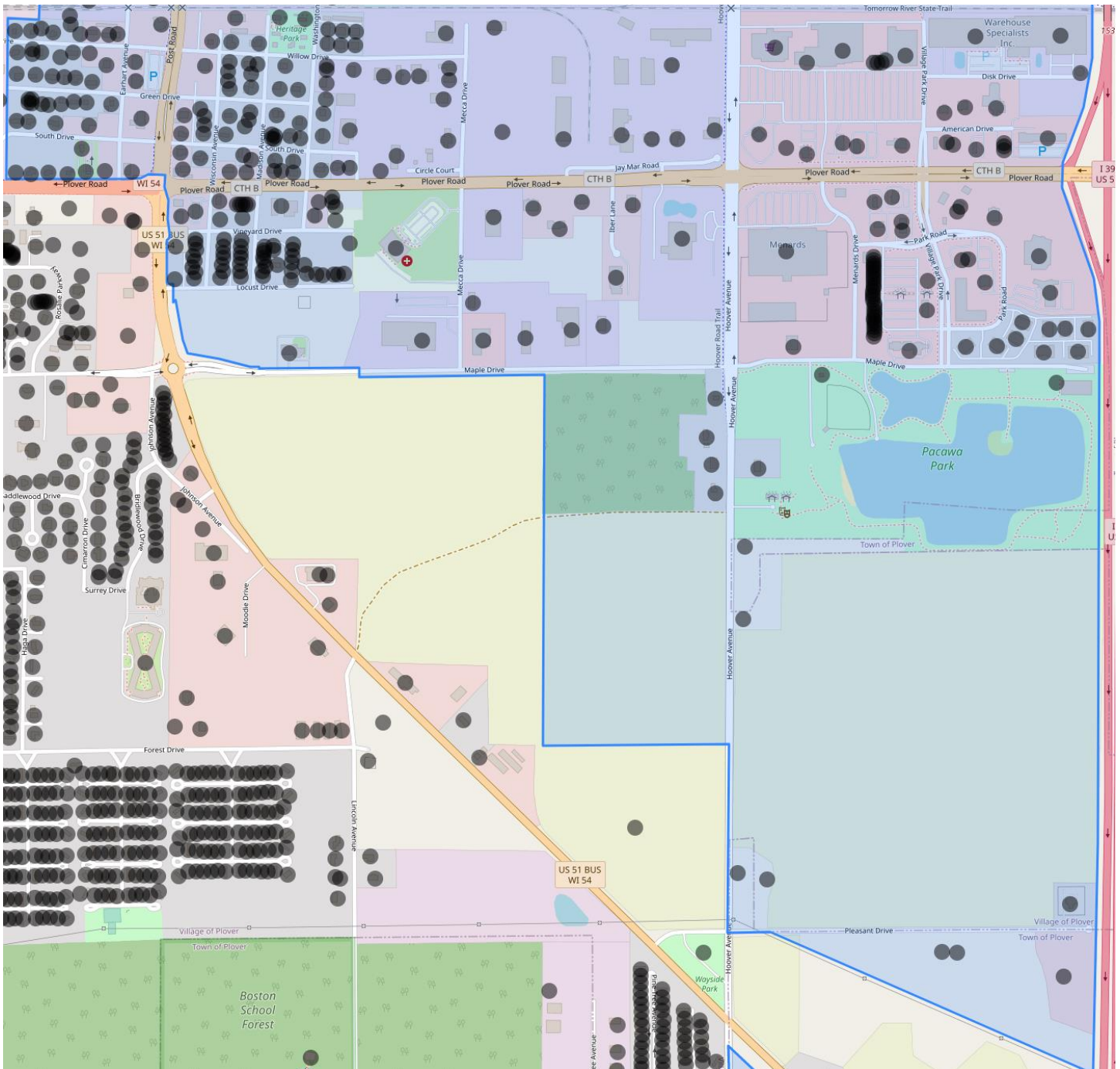
Location Detail of the Village of Plover Phase 1 - North

The project area is Blue. Each gray circle represents a location.



Location Detail of the Village of Plover Phase 1 - South

The project area is Blue. Each gray circle represents a location.



Executive Summary of this Application

The Village of Plover is a vibrant and economically diverse community ideally situated in the heart of the state. It offers a unique combination of safe and affordable living, outdoor recreation, agriculture, restaurants, coffee shops, light industrial businesses, and even a couple of microbreweries. The community has blossomed into a great place to live and do business, and local officials are committed to its continued success. At present, Plover is served by a singular internet provider and as expressed by its residents, suffering from monopolistic pricing. Poised for growth, as we will outline throughout this application, the addition of fiber infrastructure would undoubtedly fuel their continued success and introduce service to the unserved edge of the community. This broadband grant is an exciting first step to improving accessibility, affordability, and adoption for the Village of Plover.

Solarus began working with the Village of Plover in 2019 as part of a successful 2018 broadband grant application that brought service to the Town of Plover. With the 2018 Grant funds, Solarus was able to extend their Wisconsin Rapids network eastward to the Town of Plover introducing fiber to the home (FTTH) to over 160 locations, of which, 94% were unserved at the time. After completing the Grant build with the Town, Solarus has continued expanding into the Village for the last three years. To date, they have invested about \$2.2M in last-mile and middle-mile fiber facilities for the area. The total cost of construction for the project proposed here is estimated at \$2,729,448, to which the applicant will provide a matching contribution of \$1,910,612, or 70% of funding.

With this application, Solarus, in a Public-Private Partnership with the Village of Plover, proposes to deliver FTTH broadband service to at least 1,475 locations in the Village of Plover in Portage County. 100% of these locations meet the definition of either unserved or underserved. The Village has recently begun to develop an unserved area included in the Grant for future residential, commercial, and light industrial use. The development parcel will be anchored by a one-of-a-kind Food and Farm Exploration Center. The Center will provide an agrotourism and educational opportunity both onsite and through web-based platforms, highlighting both the story of where our food comes from and the technology driving the industry forward.

Solarus, having the expertise to carry out this project and the necessary matching contributions, is seeking the required additional funding through the Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant Program to successfully construct the infrastructure for these unserved and underserved areas in the Village of Plover.

Mandatory Application Requirements

3.2.1 Applicant identification and contact information

- a. **The name and address of the entity applying for the Grant, and the mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address of one or more contact persons representing the applicant.**

Name of Entity: Solarus
Mailing Address: 440 East Grand Avenue, P.O. Box 8045
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495-8045
Telephone Number: 715-421-8140
Contact: Justin Huebner, General Manager and CEO

- b. **If the application proposes a public-private partnership, the identity and contact information for all application partners.**

This application proposes a public-private partnership between the Village of Plover and Solarus.

Public Partner name: Village of Plover
Represented by: Dan Ault, Village Administrator
Business address: 2400 Post Road, P.O. Box 37
Plover, WI 54467
Phone: 715-345-5250

Solarus is represented by Justin Huebner, General Manager and CEO. See Exhibit 1.

- c. **The application must show that the applicant is an organization, a telecommunications utility, or a city, village, town, or county that has established a legal partnership or joint venture arrangement with an otherwise qualified organization or telecommunications utility, and as such meets the eligibility requirements set forth in Wis. Stat. § 196.504(1).**

Solarus is the business name of Wisconsin owned and focused Incumbent and Competitive Local Exchange Carriers certified to provide telecommunications services in the State of Wisconsin pursuant to Section 196.50(2)(b) of Wisconsin State Statute:

Wood County Telephone Company (PSCW Utility # 6770) dba Solarus provides incumbent local services in Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards, Nekoosa, Arkdale, and Rudolph.

Manawa Telephone Company (PSCW Utility # 3310) dba Solarus provides incumbent local services in Manawa and Ogdensburg.

Central Wisconsin Communications (PSCW Utility # 7018) dba Solarus provides competitive local services in parts of Marshfield, Strong's Prairie and Plover with long-distance services throughout Wisconsin.

3.2.2 Description of the project

a. A static map and description of the area of the State that will be affected by the proposed project.

Solarus and the Village of Plover propose to provide an FTTH network that will reach 1,475 business and residential locations in the Village of Plover in Portage County. The area is approximately 2.74 square miles, located along I-39. It covers the heart of the Village of Plover, where Business State Highway 51, State Highway 54, and County Highway B all come together. Plover and Post Road are commercial areas with 211 business locations. The Village of Plover Municipal building and several other anchor institutions will be serviceable as part of this Grant. Beyond these main crossroads, there are 1,264 residential locations comprised of primarily modest, single-family homes.

This area of central Wisconsin contains a combination of unserved or underserved locations according to the interim/final Wisconsin Broadband Map for FY2022. A few small pockets of the grant area were removed from the underserved map layer between the preliminary and interim/final version. Per the Broadband Map, the area along Pleasant Drive in the Town of Plover is unserved. The 160-acre parcel directly north of Pleasant Drive in the Village of Plover will be developed as a mixed-use area. The Village of Plover is looking to attract commercial and light industrial businesses mixed with some multi-dwelling unit residential properties. Solarus also considered this area to be unserved in contrast to the Broadband Map. The pockets of served and additional unserved regions will be addressed in 3.2.2.b.

b. If the project area lies within a census block designated as served on the PSC Broadband Map, provide additional documentation to demonstrate the actual broadband service that is available in the proposed project area.

Per Figure 1, a few small pockets of the grant area were removed from the underserved map layer between the preliminary and interim/final versions. Per the Reference Overlay on the PSC Broadband Map, the second carrier with 25/3 Mbps is T-Mobile fixed wireless. Figure 2 contains a zoomed-in view of these areas. Figure 3 has the PSC Broadband Map results for T-Mobile's fixed wireless service area. This shows T-Mobile's service stopping over a mile southeast of the served areas.

Upon visiting the T-Mobile website (<https://www.t-mobile.com/isp/eligibility>), Solarus received the response shown in Figure 4 for all the addresses from the areas designated as served and the green outlined underserved area from Figure 2:

- 2500 Locust Dr Lot 1,2,3,4,5,6,12,13,14,15,17,19,20, Plover
- 2441, 2450 Vineyard Dr, Plover
- 2401, 2445, 2447, 2451, 2461 Plover Rd, Plover

- 3201 Mecca Dr, Plover
- 2510 Maple Dr, Plover
- 1745, 1765, 1767, 1775, 1777, 1779, 1781, 1783, 1785, 1787, 1789, 1791, 3001, 3005 Village Park Dr, Plover
- 4835 Hoover Ave S, Plover
- 1500,1750 Pleasant Dr, Plover

T-Mobile is also the 25/3 Mbps service provider in the area outlined in green in Figure 2. As discussed in 3.2.2.a, this is the area the Village of Plover is in the process of developing. The three addresses bordering the undeveloped area were included in T-Mobile's website availability check with the same Figure 4 results. These addresses are shown green in the list above. Given the nature of fixed wireless, the undeveloped area is also not served by T-Mobile.

Based on these findings related to the T-Mobile service in the Grant area, the entire area is underserved. The Village of Plover's development area between the two unserved areas of Lake Pacawa and Pleasant Drive in the southern tip of the Grant area is also unserved after removing T-Mobile.

Figure 1: Solarus Grant area (blue outline) overlaid on PSC's Preliminary/Final Broadband Expansion Eligibility Map

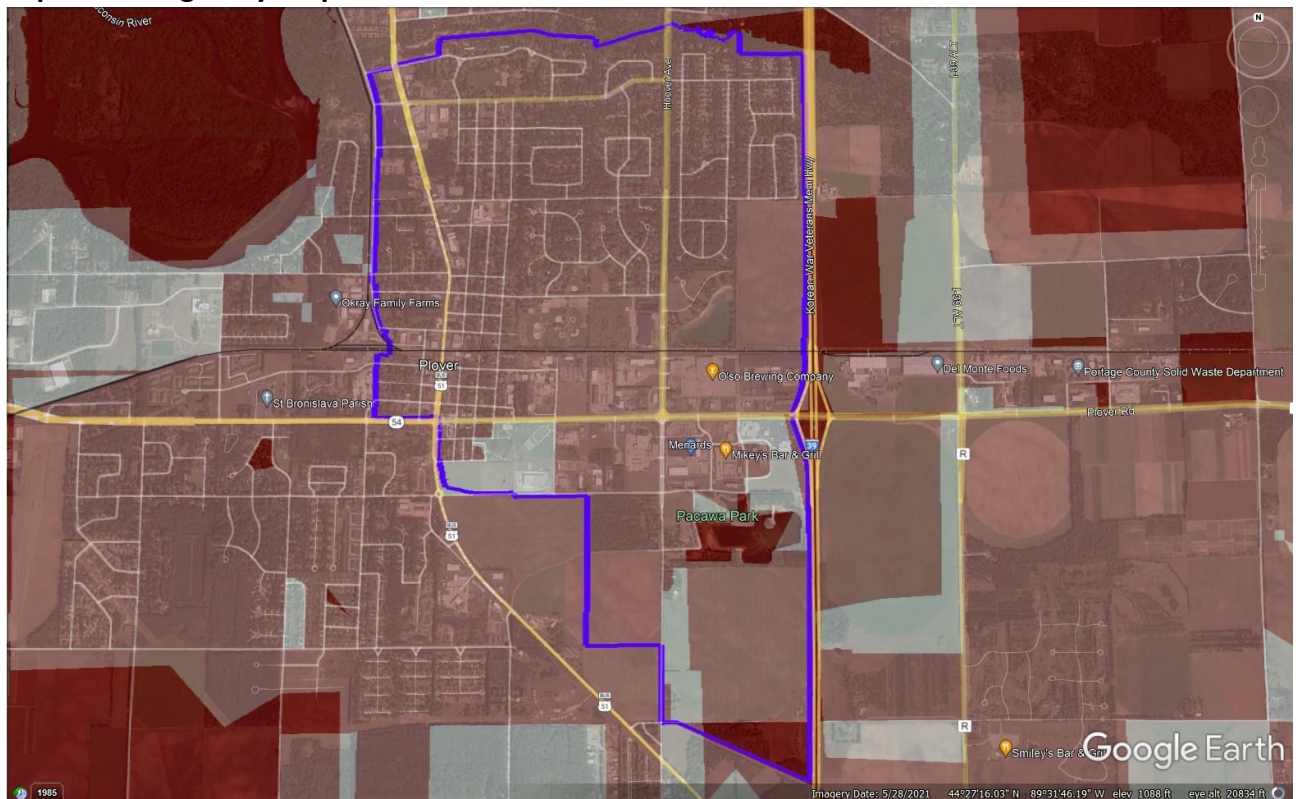


Figure 2: PSC's Preliminary/Final Broadband Expansion Eligibility Map discrepancies.

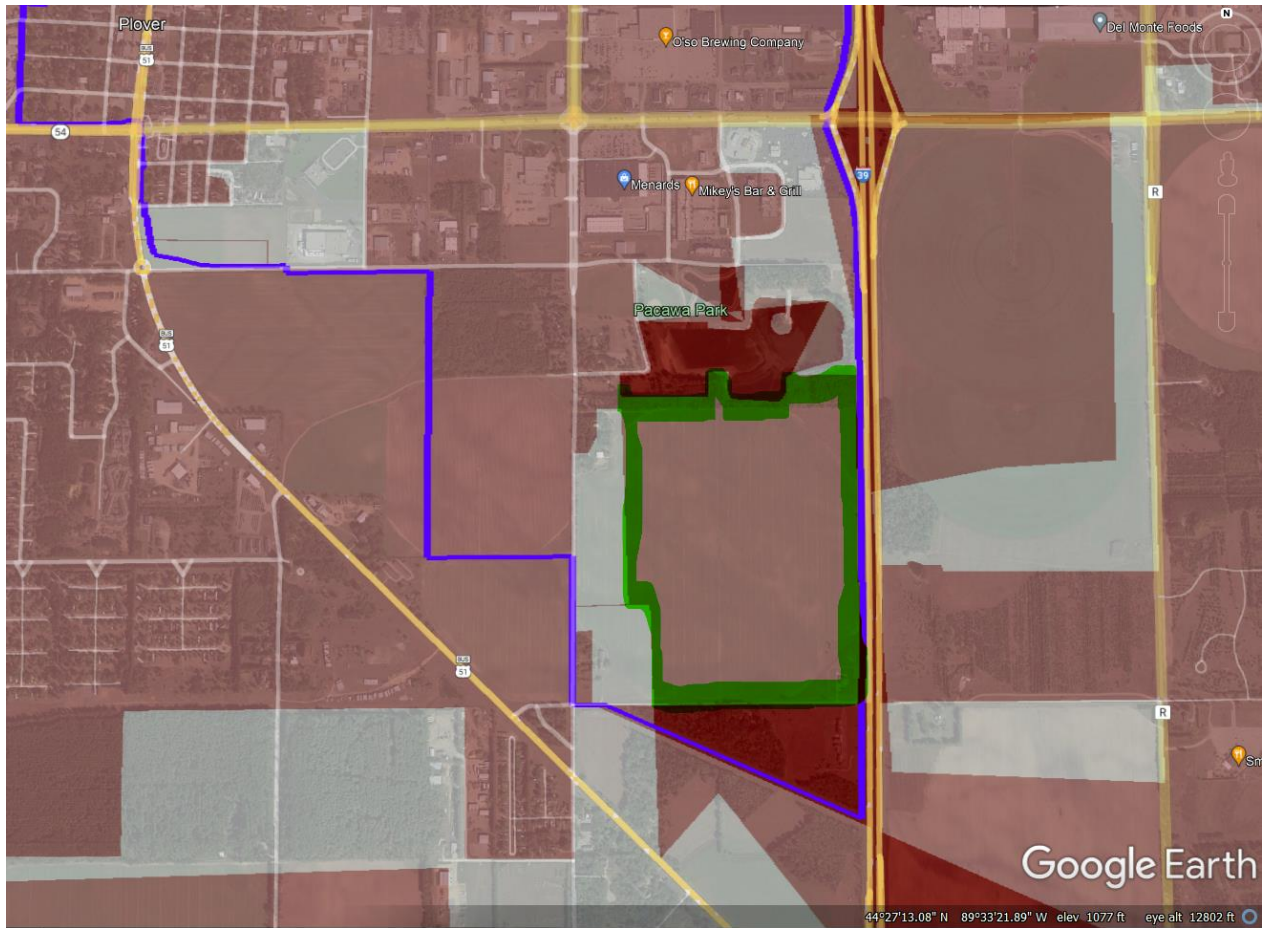


Figure 3: PSC's Broadband Map – T-Mobile (Fixed Wireless) Provider Layer

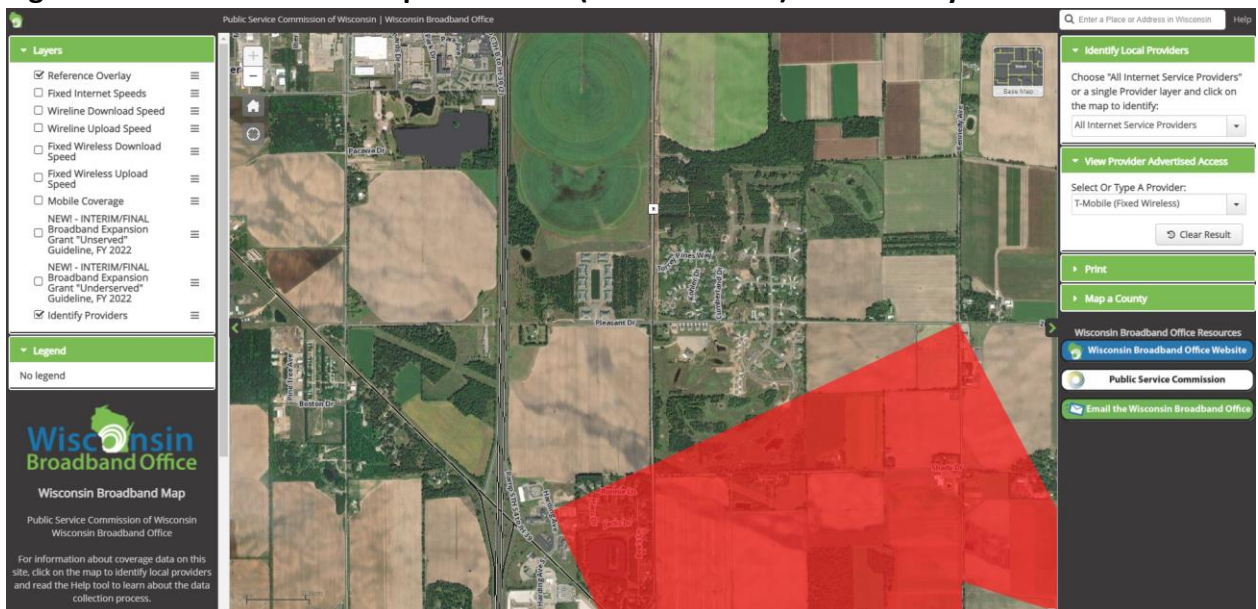



Figure 4: T-Mobile No Home Internet Availability Request Website Form

[WIRELESS](#) [BUSINESS](#) [PREPAID](#) [TV](#) [BANKING](#) [INTERNET](#)


 [Plan](#) [How it works](#) [Internet deals](#) [Support](#)

Help us bring fast, reliable T-Mobile Home Internet to your area!

Home Internet is not available at your address just yet—but our network is growing fast!

Enter your contact info below to join our waitlist, and you may impact where we grow our network next. Once service becomes available at your address, we'll let you know.

[I received a postcard in the mail, why do I have to be on a waitlist?](#)



(<https://www.t-mobile.com/isp/eligibility>)

c. An explanation of how the proposed project will increase broadband access.

- At present, there are 1,264 underserved residential locations located in the Grant area. Of which, two are entirely unserved. We received confirmation from both locations indicating they have no internet at their properties. The number of underserved and unserved households that could receive service as part of the Grant will eventually be greater than 1,264 as there are several multi-dwelling units today and more slated to go into the new development area.
- There are 211 underserved business locations located in the Grant area. Of which, four are unserved today. We received confirmation from three of these four unserved locations indicating they have no internet at their properties. The potential number of underserved and unserved businesses that could gain access to service as part of the Grant is also greater than 211 when considering the Village of Plover's plans for the new development area.
- While the Grant area does not include a concentration of seasonal residents, it will become home to a 68,000 sq ft Food and Farm Exploration Center in the next 24 months. The Center aims to attract students, families, and ag-industry professionals with its interactive exhibits and hands-on learning opportunities. They also plan to leverage technology to share the experience online, provided they have the type of connection only fiber internet can support today.
- Solarus plans to offer affordable residential broadband service at our current rates:
 - 150 Mbps Down / 150 Mbps Up for \$49.99
 - 250 Mbps Down / 250 Mbps Up for \$64.99
 - 400 Mbps Down / 400 Mbps Up for \$79.99
 - 600 Mbps Down / 600 Mbps Up for \$114.99
 - 1000 Mbps Down / 1000 Mbps Up for \$184.99
- Business speeds range from 200 Mbps Down / 20 Mbps up for \$69.99 to multi-gigabit services. The highest speed that businesses subscribe to today is 5 Gbps, but Solarus can support up to 10 Gbps. Solarus already has some fiber routes capable of 100 Gbps.
- Solarus offers optional unlimited voice and internet protocol (IP) video service to all new customers.

d. A statement whether the proposed project is targeting the "last mile," "middle mile," or backbone portion of the broadband infrastructure.

The proposed project includes all last-mile fiber construction. Solarus has already incurred the cost of the middle-mile and backbone connections. In preparation for this Grant, Solarus was able to ring middle-mile connections and placed a central office in Plover.

- e. **A description of the broadband service to be provided, including estimated download and upload speeds, whether the speed is based on dedicated or shared bandwidth, and the technology that will be used. This description may be illustrated by a map or schematic diagram, as appropriate.**

Solarus will provide its broadband service exclusively with a FTTH network. This fiber network is a like-engineered extension of the Company's existing FTTH network, currently in place and used in the Solarus ILEC and other CLEC service territories.

This FTTH network is based on a GPON architecture with 2.5 Gbps download and 1.2 Gbps upload per fiber splitter. Each splitter can support up to 32 customers, but Solarus will use a high fiber count to allow for dedicated direct fiber with no splits for high bandwidth users. Solarus can also upgrade the electronics to 10G-PON for 10 Gbps download and 2.5 Gbps upload, if necessary.

As shown in 3.2.2 b above, Solarus will market up to 1 Gbps for residential customers and up to 10 Gbps for business customers.

- f. **For middle mile projects:**

N/A as this is not a middle-mile project.

- g. **A schedule by which the applicant intends to complete the components of the proposed project. The project period is up to 24 months.**

If the Grant application for the project is approved by June of 2022, Solarus will use the following deployment schedule, based on similar projects it has completed:

Jun-Jul 2022	Finalize initial engineering and shift materials and supplies
Jul-Sep 2022	Bury distribution fiber for the first 2 or 3 splitter cabinets
Sep-Oct 2022	Bury drops to interested locations served by first splitter cabinets
Oct-Dec 2022	Install electronics and services at homes with drops
Jan-Mar 2023	Finalize the remaining engineering and order materials and supplies
Mar-Sep 2023	Bury remaining distribution fiber for remaining splitter cabinets
Sep-Oct 2023	Bury drops to interested locations for new splitter cabinets
Oct 23-Mar 24	Install electronic and service at homes with drops or temp drops
Mar-Jun 2024	Bury temp drops and complete any final project clean-up

3.2.3 Itemized Budget (all amounts should be rounded to the nearest dollar)

Figure 5: Detail budget including pricing breakdown

Exchange	DESCRIPTION	Footage	Fiber Size	Customers	Ports Needed	E7 Cards Cost	ONT Cost
Plover	Village of Plover Phase 1	111,300	96	1475	47	\$ 67,516.00	\$ 186,588.00
						A	B
		QTY	Material	Labor	Total		
	Drops	1,475	\$ 99,120.00	\$ 477,900.00	\$ 577,020.00		
	% Buried	0%			\$ -		
	Direct Buried	-	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -		
	% Bore	100%			\$ -		
	Bore	111,300	\$ 86,814.00	\$ 556,500.00	\$ 643,314.00		
	Blow Fiber	111,300		\$ 150,255.00	\$ 150,255.00		
	Splicing Burns	6,048		\$ 90,720.00	\$ 90,720.00		
	1.5" Duct	111,300	\$ 60,102.00		\$ 60,102.00		
	2" Duct	-	\$ -		\$ -		
	Large Handholes	63	\$ 26,460.00	\$ 21,609.00	\$ 48,069.00		
	Small Handholes	738	\$ 45,387.00	\$ 84,722.00	\$ 130,109.00		
	Fiber Peds	1,475	\$ 232,401.00	\$ 169,330.00	\$ 401,731.00		
	ADC Splitters	1,475	\$ 45,631.00	\$ 492.00	\$ 46,123.00		
	Splice Cases	801	\$ 409,471.00	\$ 160,200.00	\$ 569,671.00		
	Black Dirt & Seed	1,475		\$ 147,500.00	\$ 147,500.00		
	Place Warning Signs	84	\$ 2,273.00	\$ 1,894.00	\$ 4,167.00		
	Splicing			\$ 22,125.00	\$ 22,125.00		
			\$ 1,007,659.00	\$ 1,883,247.00	\$ 2,890,906.00	C	
				Total Cost (A+B+C)	\$ 3,145,010.00		
						30%	70%
			100% Total	Factor	Estimated Total	Grant Funds	Match
	Contracted labor		\$ 1,292,502.00	100%	\$ 1,292,502.00	\$ 387,751.00	\$ 904,751.00
	Variable cost based on customer penetration (Material)		\$ 353,224.00	50%	\$ 176,612.00	\$ 52,984.00	\$ 123,628.00
	Variable cost based on customer penetration (Contracted Labor)		\$ 477,900.00	50%	\$ 238,950.00	\$ 71,685.00	\$ 167,265.00
	Solarus purchased materials		\$ 908,539.00	100%	\$ 908,539.00	\$ 272,562.00	\$ 635,977.00
	Solarus splicing Labor		\$ 112,845.00	100%	\$ 112,845.00	\$ 33,854.00	\$ 78,991.00
	Total Cost (A+B+C)		\$ 3,145,010.00		\$ 2,729,448.00	\$ 818,836.00	\$ 1,910,612.00

All network facilities will be owned and managed by Solarus. No portion of the budget is related to ongoing operating expenses. The grant funds requested will be used for authorized purposes exclusively. Solarus is using a 50% penetration factor as an estimate for drops and electronics. Solarus has not included any internal planning or engineering costs in the budget.

3.2.4 Priority factors supporting the application

- a. **Matching funds.** A description of the matching funds the applicant will invest in the proposed project, if any. For each element, indicate the type of match (cash, salary expense, or in-kind contribution). If the application is submitted by a partnership, identify the partner responsible for providing each element of the proposed matching funds. Note: The requirement for this information is satisfied via inclusion of the completed Funding Statement as page 4 of the application.

Matching funds are accounted for on page 4 as part of the Summary of Project Budget and Funding Statement. The 50% penetration factor is an estimate of cost for drops and electronics. The match will be 70% of the actual cost for these construction expenses; therefore, the 70% match is not variable.

- b. **Public-private partnerships.** If the public-private partnership is memorialized in a joint venture agreement or other writing, provide a copy of that agreement. If the partnership has not been reduced to a written agreement, provide a short description of the management role, financial commitment, or other contribution to the project for each participating partner.

This application includes a public-private partnership between the Village of Plover and Solarus. The Village has agreed to:

- Provide in-kind assistance to support Solarus in the construction of fiber facilities, contingent upon Solarus being awarded full funding requested in its FY2022 State of Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant Program application;
- Provide in-kind assistance to the project in the form of waived fees and expenses for obtaining permits or permissions required from the Village of Plover Board;
- Grant permission on and across Village property, to engage in activities to construct the project in compliance with all existing rules and regulations;
- Provide community education and outreach regarding the expansion of broadband access to residences and businesses within the scope of the project; and
- Recognize that the project is a priority and is consistent with any internal planning documents adopted by the Village of Plover Board.

- c. **Existing broadband service.** A list of the broadband service providers, if any, currently serving the area the applicant proposes to serve. In scoring this element, the following factors will be taken into account:

The proposed project would duplicate existing coaxial broadband facilities provided by Charter Communications that exceed the 25/3 speed requirement. However, these areas are still considered underserved per state statute. FTTH would significantly improve the quality of internet these underserved areas now have access to specifically related to upload speed. Charter doesn't confirm their download speeds anywhere in their advertising or customer signup process, but

independent third-party sites report Charter's base package upload at 10 Mbps and their highest package at 35 Mbps. Solarus' residential fiber service is 15 times faster for the base package and 28 times faster than Charter's highest package for upload.

In some portions of the underserved area, AT&T offers DSL and fixed wireless at speeds up to 18/1.5 Mbps. CMRS mobile wireless broadband service providers include AT&T, Cellcom, Sprint, US Cellular, and Verizon. HughesNet, Viasat, and VSAT Systems, LLC offer satellite internet options.

A consumer survey conducted by Solarus throughout the proposed Grant area revealed that 96% of its more than 100 respondents subscribed to Charter as that was their only option. Charter is aware of the monopoly and has been known to charge as much as 150% more than they charge in areas where Solarus presents as competition.

- d. **Project impact. A description of the geographic area and the population, both in terms of absolute numbers and likely users, which will be served by the proposed project. Indicate the number of anticipated residential and business customers in the project area, if known. Explain the speed and quality of internet service that will be available. Include information about the range of packages available for purchase. Provide details on any low-income access programs and steps the project will take to support adoption.**

All 1,475 customers will be better served as a result of this Grant project in one of two ways:

- They will switch to Solarus fiber internet services to receive a more robust internet option provided by a locally owned company invested in their community's success,
- Or their Charter bill will go down by 50% because of the presence of Solarus fiber internet service in the Grant area.

As Solarus is the applicant for this Grant, it would be better to take the words of Charter's customers via the survey Solarus conducted:

- "We have been gouged for years because of the lack of options and competition in our area. I know people that have Solarus service and are extremely happy with them. I look forward to their approval and expansion into our area. Thanks!" – Joe
- "I had Solarus when I lived in Wisconsin Rapids for 24 years and had outstanding service." – Bruce
- "Need options and to save money where we can!" – Ryan
- "We live on a fixed income. Inflation is impacting our quality of life. We are in need of an affordable solution." – Thomas
- "I would switch in an instant. I'm tired of the monopoly on high-speed internet. This is way overdue." – Jerome
- "I am hoping Solarus can bring a quality service at a lower price. 40+ years of being a customer does not seem to matter to our current provider. Their advice was to drop the service for 30 days and then be considered a new customer. Not nice." – Kaye

- “I have not at all been happy with Charter/Spectrum’s service. My speeds and connection are both unreliable. I’d love to have a competing option available to us Village of Plover residents.” – Joshua
- “I teach for the university and reliable home Internet is a must. That has not been the case with my current provider, and I don’t have any other options available.” – Rachel
- “Provide a more competitive and reliable Internet experience.” - Ric
- “I welcome consumer choice brought on by healthy competition. Our current service has been adequate, but the price continues to increase with limited increase in speed or other services.” – Chris
- “I have friends that have Solarus and love it. It is frustrating to only have Spectrum as an option now and service and customer service is horrible. Looking forward to having Solarus in the future.” – Shawn
- “We have no competition in the Village of Plover. We are trapped to spectrum only which basically gives them a monopoly in this Village. Help get us out of this aged infrastructure of cable and into the future!!” – Jamie
- “There is no competition for internet in my area. You must pay the price of the only internet available.” – Jennifer
- “I pay \$75 a month for Spectrum internet. That’s just too much!” – Steve
- “We really don’t like being stuck with Charter/Spectrum as our only option, that charges extra because we don’t have phone or tv bundled.” – Alexander
- “I feel like the competition a fiber internet provider could bring to the area would improve the overall customer experience regardless of provider. Currently, I cannot lower my bill or get good customer service because we both know I have no other option. I am paying the same amount now as a new customer would pay for the next tier of service. If I want the next tier, it’s a \$20/month bill increase and a \$50 installation. With more competition those billing, and reliability issues would improve in my opinion.” – James

Survey respondents were also able to share what excited them about the prospect of having Solarus as a service provider.

- 75% were excited about the affordability of their internet.
- 74% were looking forward to an improved customer experience because Solarus is a local provider instead of a national company.
- 47% were excited about the increased speeds and capabilities of the Solarus fiber internet solution and packages.

The unserved locations included in the Grant area will realize even greater gains. These homes are only 1,500 to 2,500 ft from existing Charter service locations. Residents can literally see the neighboring home with internet access but have no voice with a national provider to allow them to get the internet brought down their road. This area is adjacent to the new development and its accessibility is a major concern of the Village. Homes and businesses can no longer function

without proper internet connectivity. Using satellite or cellular for the internet is costly, unreliable, and limited by data caps and speed throttling.

Solarus internet packages are already included in 3.2.2 c.

- e. **Scalability. A description of how the proposed project could expand or improve the broadband service it delivers, while maintaining the quality of its broadband service. This description should include specific projected increases in the following parameters that are known at the time of the application:**

This Grant project is a scalability payoff from the Solarus 2018 Grant to build across to Plover and serve unserved locations along the way. Since 2018, Solarus has invested nearly \$2.2 million in preparation for this round of Grants. Solarus is currently completing a redundant fiber ring into Plover on the northwest and out of Plover on the southeast. Another benefit from the 2018 Grant was a connection with Amherst Telephone Company. Solarus and Amherst have both made additional investments to allow that connection to create a fiber ring over to Manawa Telephone, which is also owned and operated by Solarus. The ring will provide additional redundancy for the Plover project having both a primary and secondary ring to keep it connected to the redundant backbone network Solarus has built.

Solarus' recent investment in a central office specific to Plover on that fiber ring will facilitate even more scalability. This Grant area is phase 1 of a larger overbuild of all of Plover in the coming years. Similar to the 2018 Grant, Solarus will continue to invest beyond this initial buildout. The current plan is to continue north of the proposed Grant area up to the Village's northern border with Stevens Point and Whiting. Phase 3 would be to complete the last third of Plover - or the area southwest of the proposed Grant. This plan has been reviewed with the Village. Future expansion will be prioritized to serve as many business and residential customers as quickly as possible without the assistance of additional grant funding. The additional phases would include over 3,000 additional FTTH locations.

This application is evidence of the scalable nature of Solarus' ability to expand its architecture and marketing reach to new adjacent service areas. Ancillary activities such as billing, pricing, support, technology, backbone network, and many others can be scaled across this Grant area. While very few independent companies would choose to go up against Charter, Solarus is experienced in competing with them in their ILEC and CLEC markets. Charter's network is being subsidized by the power of monopolistic pricing, allowing for a 50% premium being paid by all their customers. Their network is aging as there is no pressure to improve or enhance without competition. The Village and community members are very concerned about the viability of their existing internet option, as can be heard through their comments above.

- f. **Economic development. A description of how the proposed project will promote job growth or retention, expand the property tax base or improve the overall economic vitality of the municipality or region. This description may be supplemented with a letter from one or more persons discussing the potential economic impact the project could have for that individual or business. In scoring this element, the following factors will be taken into account:**

During our initial meeting with the Village of Plover, discussion was focused around the unserved area they are working on developing. They appreciate the role internet plays in attracting and retaining businesses and people to the community but see even more value to this new development. The Village of Plover is a young municipality incorporated in 1971. Today, almost 40% of Plover's population is new since the addition of I-39 in the 1990's. This growth is perhaps a tip of the hat to the success of Eisenhower's Interstate buildout and a nod to broadband's modern-day equivalent. Since incorporation, Plover has averaged 26.5% growth over the last four censuses, and they understand broadband infrastructure will be the catalyst for future success.

As we mentioned earlier, plans for a Farm and Food Exploration Center within the proposed grant area are underway. The project is being led by the Farming for the Future Foundation - a collaboration of local grower families with deep roots in this part of the state. Their goal is to educate, create awareness and change some of the misguided perceptions about life in agriculture. The Center will not only add a unique destination anchor to Plover with anticipated visitors of 66,000 annually, but will also serve as a regional conference facility.

The Center will serve the community by bringing together the most impactful and in-demand aspects of a science center, a children's museum, a teaching farm, a culinary school, a botany lab, a makerspace, and even a tractor showroom—all rolled into a tantalizing celebration of food and farming. With access to a robust fiber network, there will be no limitation on how elaborate they can design their programming to be or how far they can extend it through virtual channels. This is where their mission and Solarus' success with this grant application intersect.

Modern production agriculture is a vibrant, innovative industry that uses advanced technology to grow, process and distribute the food we all need to survive. It only makes sense that an organization trying to tell that story needs to have and use the best technology itself.

The success of this grant application will provide a solid foundation for the Exploration Center as well as the rest of the community. Located in the heart of the state, with easy access to the I-39 corridor, Plover is an attractive option for residents and businesses alike. In recent months, numerous large employers such as Sentry Insurance, Delta Dental, Skyward, Travel Guard, and more have demonstrated their commitment to the area by building new facilities in and around Plover. Their progressive environments continue to attract educated middle to high-income earners who choose to reside in the Grant area for its affordability and exceptional quality of life.

Access to affordable, advanced Internet will be an essential component to this community's ongoing success.

Please see the letters of support submitted by community stakeholders and elected officials highlighting the relevance fiber connectivity will have on the economic development of this area.

g. Effect upon broadband service to adjacent areas. A description of whether the proposed project will or will not impair the ability of a broadband service provider or competing broadband service provider to extend broadband service to areas adjacent to the proposed project area.

Solarus does not believe this Grant will impair any other service provider from extending broadband service to areas adjacent to or even into the proposed Grant area. Competition can make both organizations stronger. As Solarus builds fiber internet, Charter could be motivated to invest in their network to remain competitive. They could even make those improvements preemptively to better position themselves as a customer-conscientious provider.

Attracting successful businesses to the new Village development could also motivate others to expand into that area once the companies are in place. Charter has not been willing to expand their services east on Pleasant Drive for a couple of homes and small businesses, but a whole new business park might change their mind. The success of this Grant allows Solarus to make the investment now and will encourage others to follow and compete in the future when the businesses have arrived.

3.2.5 Other information supporting the application

a. A description of applicant's history or experience constructing broadband communications facilities in the State and elsewhere.

Solarus has been providing telecommunications services since 1896. After 125 years, change is one of the only constants. During the early 2000s, at the peak of voice and dial-up internet, Solarus had over 30,000 customers. For Solarus, it has always been about keeping their customers connected, building better networks, and supporting the people and places that make their community a great place to live and do business.

Over the last 11 years, Solarus has invested \$8 to \$10 million a year in fiber construction and electronics. They have built FTTH to over 20,000 locations. 2022 will be the last year of mainline buildout in the Wood County Telephone Company ILEC area and this opens the door for additional expansion of the Solarus CLEC network in Plover.

While building the ILEC area, Solarus has completed other CLEC fiber buildouts besides the 2018 Grant project and its subsequent builds in the Village of Plover. Solarus built northwest and serves 83 business customers throughout the Marshfield area. Solarus has also expanded south to the

east shore of Lake Petenwell and Castle Rock Lake and serves 166 residential customers in that area.

Solarus has repeatedly constructed more than 100 miles of fiber and passed more than 1,500 locations per year. As the last of their ILEC construction is completed, Plover is a natural space for Solarus and its contractor partners to expand into.

b. A description of how the proposed project will or will not duplicate existing broadband infrastructure.

As discussed in 3.2.4 c the Grant area will duplicate existing broadband infrastructure similar to how the automotive roads duplicated train routes. In both cases, the existence of the latter didn't render the more contemporary option unnecessary or any less expensive to construct. In fact, the interstate system leveled the playing field for rural residents and created connectivity with their urban counterparts. A secondary broadband option would undoubtedly enable residents to break free from monopoly pricing, but more importantly, it would allow them to remain connected and competitive in the larger economic landscape.

c. A description of an applicant's financial ability to undertake the proposed broadband construction project.

As discussed above in 3.2.5 a, Solarus has been constructing FTTH at a pace of \$8-\$10 million per year. To sustain that rate of construction, Solarus has capital facilities in place for continued investment. Solarus has maintained a strong return on investment for its local shareholders for the entirety of its 125-year history. Solarus spends most of its advertising budget supporting local non-profits, capital campaigns and community initiatives instead of filling mailboxes with junk mail. Building trust and relationships takes longer, but it has proven to be a worthwhile endeavor.

d. For middle mile projects, state the terms under which the applicant will make its middle mile fiber resource available to last mile providers.

Not applicable as this project is last mile.

e. For middle mile routes, state the amount of fiber capacity, by number of fiber strands in a cable, that the applicant has been reserved for public use.

Not applicable as this project is last mile.

f. A description of how the proposed project will affect the ability of individuals to access health care service from home, including any impact upon the costs of those services.

Solarus provides service to over 50 Aspirus Health Care locations throughout the midwest. In the Grant area, there is an outpatient Aspirus clinic that offers Primary and Urgent Care services. Telehealth enables rural clinics like this to deliver quality healthcare services locally and at lower costs, but also provides patients access to a wide variety of specialty care not available without having to travel a long distance to larger care facilities.

As rural America experiences physician shortages, telemedicine will continue to play an important role in ensuring patients can access the care they need. Ample upload speed will be imperative for both health care facilities and patients alike.

g. A description of how the proposed project will affect the ability of students to access educational opportunities from home.

In their ILEC service territory, Solarus has partnered with local school districts to ensure every child has access to the internet and the resources they need for remote learning. They did this by creating a wholesale internet connection via a wide area network. This system empowers the schools to identify the children that need connectivity while keeping their content filtering systems and application provisioning in place. While the children received internet for free, the schools were charged a reduced rate for the service and paid for it with funding from eligible government programs.

Solarus would look to partner with the Stevens Point School district in a similar fashion. There is one elementary school in the Grant area that could be served by Solarus. Phase 2 and 3 of the Plover project would see expansion of services to two additional elementary schools. As TDS is a partner with Solarus on other wide area networks and is building out the adjacent Stevens Point community, it would make sense for Solarus to work with TDS to bring a similar approach to the Stevens Point School District.

h. A description of actions taken by a city, village, town, or county in support of the grant application that have not been discussed in the context of a public-private partnership above, including but not limited to:

Beyond the items already documented as part of the public-private partnership, the Village of Plover has also assisted Solarus with planning this application. The Village helped prioritize this project area for phase one to create the maximum initial impact on the community while jump-starting the additional phases. Solarus is excited to continue to work with the Village throughout this Grant and future phase.

i. Letters and messages in support of the application submitted by prospective customers, local government officials, and other interested persons.

List of Support:

- Village of Plover Public-Private Partnership Agreement – EXHIBIT 1
- Farming for the Future Foundation Letter of Support – EXHIBIT 2
- State Senator Patrick Testin Letter of Support – EXHIBIT 3
- State Representative Katrina Shankland Letter of Support – EXHIBIT 4
- Portage County Business Council Letter of Support – EXHIBIT 5
- Members' Advantage Credit Union Letter of Support – EXHIBIT 6
- Solarus Survey of Grant area locations – See 3.2.4 d for a summary of these results, including some quotes supplied from households and businesses.

j. Any other equitable factor that the applicant desires to discuss, including one or more of the factors in Wis. Stat. § 196.03(6) that the applicant believes its project would advance. In discussing this element, the following information may be useful:

Solarus is in the process of launching the Affordable Connectivity Program. Solarus is already a Lifeline provider, so much of the program is already in place. As outlined, the program will provide a \$30 credit for families making less than 200% of the federal poverty line. Solarus is creating a discounted internet package that would allow for free internet for individuals who qualify for the federal credit.

Over the past few years, Solarus and its Customer Service team have been encouraging customers to cut the cord on expensive cable TV packages. They have created multiple tools and educational campaigns highlighting the potential savings customers could see in streaming content over the internet vs subscribing to bulky cable packages. <https://www.solarus.net/streamtv/>

EXHIBIT 1

Public Private Partnership Agreement

By and between the Village of Plover, Wisconsin and Solarus

THIS AGREEMENT (the "Agreement") is made this 16th day of March, 2022 by and among the Participating Parties (defined below) located in the State of Wisconsin (the "State"), which, through their duly authorized representatives, have signed this Agreement.

WHEREAS, the Village of Plover, a political subdivision in Portage County, in the State of Wisconsin, seeks to help provide access to resources and the support structure necessary for economic development within its boundaries; and

WHEREAS, Solarus, a Wisconsin company doing business in the County, proposes to expand broadband capability to reach un-served or underserved residences and businesses in the Village of Plover where such service is commonly unavailable or is prohibitively expensive; and

WHEREAS, it is currently expected that the proposed broadband expansion would be constructed in areas within the Village of Plover, Wisconsin and the enhanced broadband access and availability will be utilized to position the Village for desirable economic growth by addressing existing service disparities; and

WHEREAS, Solarus is applying for a Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant through the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin to expand access to broadband service in the Village of Plover, specifically by deploying fiber optic services to an area framed by the Little Plover River (North), Interstate 39 (East), Pleasant Drive (South), and Okray Avenue (West), with drops to all locations that want connection and

WHEREAS, to further support its application for a Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant, Solarus has requested that the Village of Plover Board enter into an Agreement, referred to as a Public Private Partnership Agreement, to assist in this Project by:

Providing in-kind assistance to support Solarus in the construction of fiber facilities, contingent upon Solarus being awarded full funding requested in its FY2022 State of Wisconsin Broadband Expansion Grant Program application ("Project");

Providing in-kind assistance to the Project in the form of waived fees and expenses for obtaining permits or permissions required from the Village of Plover Board;

Granting permission on and across Village property, to engage in activities to construct the Project in compliance with all existing rules and regulations;

Providing community education and outreach regarding the expansion of broadband access to residences and businesses within the scope of the Project; and

Recognizing that the Project is a priority and is consistent with any internal planning documents adopted by the Village of Plover Board.

NOW, THEREFORE, it is hereby agreed by and among the Parties as follows:

1. Records. The Village of Plover Board or its designated committee will maintain and be the custodian of all records associated with the administering and performance of this Agreement, and will make those records available upon request.
2. Reporting. Solarus shall meet with the Village of Plover Board on a semi-annual basis for the purpose of presenting an oral report on the status of the Project. The date, time and place of such meeting shall be determined cooperatively among the parties. No fewer than seven (7) days prior to such meeting, Solarus shall provide a report regarding siting and construction progress with respect to the Project.
3. Effective Date. This Agreement shall become effective upon its adoption and shall remain in full force and effect until terminated as provided herein.
4. New Members. After the effective date of this Agreement, additional municipalities may join in this Agreement.
5. Termination. This Agreement shall be deemed terminated by any party upon thirty (30) days written notice requesting termination of this Agreement in whole or in part.
6. Severability. The terms of this Agreement are severable and any determination by any court or agency having jurisdiction over the subject matter of this Agreement that results in the invalidity of any part shall not affect the remainder of the Agreement.
7. Amendments. The terms of this Agreement shall not be amended without the written authorization of the governing bodies of all Participating Parties.
8. Governing Law. This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the State of Wisconsin.
9. Counterparts. This Agreement may be executed in two or more counterparts, each of which shall be deemed an original, but all of which together shall constitute one and the same instrument.

VILLAGE OF PLOVER, WISCONSIN,
a Participating Party

By: 

Name: Dan Ault

Title: Village Administrator

Date: March 16, 2022

SOLARUS
a Participating Party

By: 

Justin Huebner, CEO and General Manager

Date: March 16, 2022

EXHIBIT 2



March 10, 2022

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison, Wisconsin 53705

Dear Public Service Commission of Wisconsin Officials,

On behalf of Farming for the Future Foundation, I am writing to express my support for Solarus's broadband expansion grant application, as it will greatly benefit our ability to serve the people of our state at the future Food + Farm Exploration Center.

The Food + Farm Exploration Center, will be located in the heart of Central Wisconsin, within the Village of Plover. It will be the physical embodiment of our mission is to bring everyone to the table to tell the story of modern agriculture. While ideally situated in the heart of the state to maximize visitor potential, the Center's future site is currently unserved and will require advanced broadband connectivity to meet our mission.

The Food + Farm Exploration Center is designed to create connections between the public and one of Wisconsin's largest industries – agriculture; through experiential content that will frame students, families, and visitors' connection to their food, foster positive perceptions of how food is grown and its crucial role in feeding our state and the world. Through the hands-on educational learning center with interactive exhibits focused on various areas of crop production, the science behind farming, the water cycle and cutting-edge technology used in agriculture today. Also including, a growing space for hands-on learning, agriculture-based summer day camps, programming opportunities, scholarship offerings, and programming experiences for inner-city students to develop their understanding of agriculture.

The center will serve as a portal to explore the intersections of agriculture, education, STEM, economic and workforce development and tourism. We are developing partnerships to be a world class, destination location for:

- Workforce development & training for K-12, technical college, university students and lifelong learners along with virtual learning opportunities for those not physically on site
- Agriculture research, through statewide educational partners
- National and international agrotourism
- A training venue for business, and premier location for state, national and international agriculture events and visiting delegations
- Provide virtual learning opportunities for those not physically on site to be able to participate virtually in programs

The center will serve to showcase how technologically advanced agriculture is today and the future of the industry all will require advanced connectivity to make this center a reality. We are urging the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin to support Solarus's broadband expansion grant application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Candise Miller".

Candise Miller, Executive Director



PATRICK TESTIN
STATE SENATOR

EXHIBIT 3

February 2nd, 2022

Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
4822 Madison Yards Way
Madison, WI 53705

Dear Public Service Commission of Wisconsin Officials,

I am writing to express my support for Solarus's broadband expansion grant application, as it has the potential to improve the lives of my constituents in the Village of Plover.

Solarus is the largest independent telecommunications company in our state, and they have proven to be a reliable partner for broadband expansion in Central Wisconsin. The public-private partnership that they are currently proposing with the Village of Plover would result in faster internet delivery to 1,500 locations in underserved areas, including 200 businesses. A portion of the project's proposed development is entirely unserved. This section includes the future site of the Food & Farm Exploration Center, a major project of the [Farming for the Future Foundation](#).

Internet is infrastructure, and in today's increasingly connected world, going without high speed internet severely limits access to opportunity for individuals and businesses. The Village of Plover has grown over eight percent in the last decade, and reliable internet connectivity will help the community to continue to thrive and develop.

Thank you for your consideration of this application, and know that its fulfillment will help bridge a gap in opportunity for many deserving people and businesses.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Testin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick Testin
WI State Senator,
Senate District 24



EXHIBIT 4

March 1, 2022

Wisconsin Broadband Office
Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

Dear Members of the Public Service Commission State Broadband Office:

I appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on Solarus' application for funding under the Broadband Expansion Program for a proposed expansion project in the Village of Plover. I write to offer my strong and enthusiastic support for their application and appreciate their continued efforts to expand broadband access in Central Wisconsin.

Broadband access is critical to a strong economy, from growing small businesses and supporting farm operations to ensuring everyone has access to education, healthcare, and government at all levels. The Covid-19 pandemic has certainly underscored the need for reliable broadband.

Yet, according to BroadbandNow, only 23.5% of Wisconsinites have access to fiber-optic service, compared to the national average of 43% of Americans with access to the same. We also currently rank 32nd for the most connected state, falling from 30th a few years ago. Too many people in Portage County still do not have the Internet access that they need, and this grant application will help fill the gaps, covering a 1,500-address area that includes over 200 businesses, 100% of which qualify as underserved. Additionally, the grant would help fulfill the broadband needs of an unserved area south of Lake Pacawa in the Village of Plover.

Solarus is now the largest independent telecommunications company in Wisconsin, and this company got its start in Central Wisconsin. Their state-of-the-art fiber network is the gold standard of both residential and business Internet connections, offering up to 1,000 Mbps. I've been pleased to support their prior expansion efforts in Portage County, even participating in a tour of the construction process, and I appreciate their efforts to involve and educate the community in this project. I wholeheartedly support Solarus' application to expand broadband access in the Village of Plover, which will in turn support the local economy, boost education and healthcare access, benefit public safety, and improve our community's overall quality of life.

I appreciate this vital opportunity to support a broadband project that will fulfill a pressing need for area residents in Portage County. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can provide any further information for this excellent application. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Katrina Shankland
Katrina Shankland
State Representative
71st Assembly District

EXHIBIT 5



March 11, 2022

RE: Wisconsin Public Service Commission Broadband Grant

Dear Wisconsin Public Service Commission,

I am writing this letter in support of the Solarus application for expansion of Broadband services in Portage County.

As the Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development organization for all of Portage County I can not stress the importance of the increased broadband service outlined in the Solarus grant application. Our number one goal in the county is the attraction and retention of businesses and employees to Portage County. Reliable high speed internet is no longer a “nice to have” but truly a “need to have” for every aspect of our community success. Businesses, homes, education, agriculture, public and emergency services and visitors to our area all depend on a strong communication platform and having a company like Solarus delivering fiber accessibility will be a positive addition to all of Portage County.

Here in Portage County we have members throughout the area and Solarus is one of our members and an active member in Portage County Business Council. Having the ability to pick up the phone and have a conversation with a local provider that can help, answer questions and support the local structure is imperative.

This is an exciting proposal and I support this grant application for Solarus’s Broadband Expansion in Portage County.

Respectfully Submitted



Michael W. Witte
Executive Director
Portage County Business Council

Your Chamber & Economic Development Partner

5501 Vern Holmes Drive • Stevens Point, WI 54482 • P 715-344-1940 • F 715-344-4473
info@portagecountybiz.com • PortageCountyBiz.com



CREDIT UNION

www.membersadvantagecu.com

EXHIBIT 6

March 4, 2022

Public Service Commission
Wisconsin Broadband Office
4822 Madison Yards Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53705

I'm writing on behalf of Members Advantage Credit Union in support of Solarus' broadband expansion efforts into the Plover area. Much like Solarus, we serve both residential and commercial customers in both Wood and Portage Counties. Currently, Solarus is the telecommunications provider at our Wisconsin Rapids location, but our Plover branch is only connected to their network through a 3rd party vendor. We are using a separate voice carrier at that location but have become increasingly frustrated by their exorbitant rate increases and unresponsive customer service.

Ironically, I learned about this grant application when I recently reached out to see what it would take for Solarus to get to our Plover location. As it turns out, our Plover site is situated within their proposed project area. While our Credit Union would certainly benefit from direct access to their fiber network, we feel compelled to advocate on behalf of the many residents and small businesses around us that are hamstrung by today's limited Internet options. Like it has in the Wisconsin Rapids area, access to fiber would - at the very least - introduce a competitive marketplace. But even more importantly, it would position our community for long-term success.

Having done business with them for many years and having witnessed their commitment to the Wisconsin Rapids area, I will attest that any funding awarded to Solarus, would be a solid investment in our growing, economically diverse community. I appreciate your consideration and invite you to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads 'Tammy Schwebach-Erdman'.

Tammy Schwebach-Erdman
Chief Financial Officer
Members Advantage Credit Union
(715) 421-7769 | tammys@membersadvantagecu.com

1610 Lincoln St. • P.O. Box 1208 • Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54495 • (715) 421-1610

1760 Plover Road • P.O. Box 608 • Plover, WI 54467 • (715) 344-7440